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ABSTRACT

Competence in multicultural counseling has been defined as the knowledge of clients' culture and the ability to devise innovative strategies vis-a-vis the unique client needs. Data were collected to assess the specific most critical needs of graduate students (N=79) enrolled in a cross-cultural counseling course. During the first session over four consecutive semesters, students completed the Culture Shock Inventory (CSI). The results revealed that lowest levels of student awareness were found on the cognitive flex, culture knowledge-specific, and interpersonal sensitivity subscales of the CSI. These findings suggest that areas that would be most troublesome to these students when interacting with culturally different clients would be in remaining open to and accepting of new ideas, beliefs, and perspectives and accepting them as valid; being able to identify ways specific cultural behaviors and beliefs uniquely differ from those of the mainstream culture; and effectively maintaining interaction with individuals whose interpersonal styles differ from their own. High scores on the cultural behavior-general and culture knowledge-general subscales suggest that students recognize the importance of the study of cultural differences. These findings have implications for counselor educators designing courses in multi-cultural counseling. (NB)

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What Counselor-trainees Need Most in Cross-Cultural Education: Some Suggestions for Course Content of one Semester Courses

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Abstract

Suggestions for how counselor educators might more effectively and efficiently accommodate students' needs in the area of cross-cultural training are presented and discussed.

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Introduction

Competence in multicultural counseling has been defined as the knowledge of clients' culture and the ability to devise innovative strategies vis-a-vis the unique clients needs (Human Rights Committee of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision; Ibrahim et al, 1986). Sue et al (1982), Pedersen (1985), and Ponterotto & Casas (1987) all agree that culturally sensitive counselors must consider how values and various cultural backgrounds interact with the power-dominant host society's cultural patterns. All strongly recommend that the knowledge of clients' culture and status, as well as actual experiences with these clients are essential components to any training intending to increase competence in multicultural counseling skills. In vivo exposure and behavioral interaction with culturally different persons in addition to the traditional cognitive approach to training (i.e. lectures, discussions, reading) are perceived as mandatory parts of training (Lefley, 1985; S. Sue et al, 1985). What should be included in multicultural training has been clearly defined by the discipline of Counseling Psychology.

The unanswered question by Moses (1990) remains: "How can the discipline train psychologists who can handle all the issues involved?" With increasing diversity within the USA population comes the challenge for trainers to address a larger number of 'culturally different' groups. For example, 'Asian American' is a global term that geographically also includes other cultures such as East Indian and Thai in addition to that of Japanese and Chinese. Typically, Thai and East Indian

cultures are not addressed in cross-cultural coursework even though these populations are becoming more representative within the USA today. Subcultures unrelated to race and ethnicity are now identified as 'minorities' or 'special populations' and require attention in training (i.e. gay/lesbian, physically challenged, specific religious groups, etc.). Often these special populations are expected to also be addressed within cross-cultural coursework. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that multicultural training in most APA approved programs is typically limited to only one course (Strozier & Hills, 1989). While new professionals are expected to be more effectively trained in this area, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to teach.

Given the previously mentioned recommendations for effective training in this area, it would seem an overwhelming task for effective training to actually occur in one semester even if culturally sensitive materials are addressed adequately in all other classes. In order to use time more efficiently and focus more emphatically on students primary issues, this author suggests that course curriculum must be based upon the needs, interests, and deficits of the students enrolled. This strategy would allow all recommendations to be included, with an emphasis based upon students' needs. This paper is the presentation of data collected to assess the specific most critical needs of graduate students enrolled in a cross-cultural counseling course in an APA approved program over a 2 year period.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of graduate students enrolled in a course, 'Cross-Cultural Counseling', offered by an APA approved department of Counseling Psychology on a large (enrollment approximately 26,000) predominantly White midwestern university campus. During the first classroom session over four consecutive semesters, students were asked to complete the Culture Shock Inventory (CSI; Reddin & Rowell, 1981) as a part of a classroom exercise. The course was a departmental requirement for all doctoral level students and was required by the state board of counselor certification for all masters level students enrolled. Eighty-four students participated; 32 (38%) were doctoral students; and, 51 (60%) were female. Two (2.38%) were African-American; 2 (2.38%) were Hispanic-American; and, 1 (1.19%) was Asian-American. Because of the limited enrollment of minority students in the participant pool and because most graduate students in Counseling Psychology programs in the USA are majority group members , the researcher decided to include only Culture Shock Inventory (CSI) subscale scores for Anglo American students (n=79) in the treatment of the data.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is the Culture Shock Inventory (CSI) which was designed to acquaint those who expect to work outside their own culture with some of the things that might prove troublesome. Culture shock is a psychological disorientation caused by misunderstanding, or not understanding,

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cues from another culture. It arises from such things that this instrument addresses. It is recommended for use with college student populations during cross cultural training.

The eight subscales assess the following: a) lack of western ethnocentrism (the degree to which the western value system is seen as possibly inappropriate for other parts of the world); b) experience (the degree of direct experience with people from other countries through working, traveling and conversing, and also learned skills such as reading and speaking foreign languages); c) cognitive flex (the degree of openness to new ideas and beliefs and the degree to which these are accepted by the individual); d) behavioral flex (the degree to which ones own behavior is open to change); e) cultural knowledge-specific (the degree of awareness and understanding of various beliefs and patterns of behavior in specific other cultures); f) cultural knowledge-general (the degree of awareness and understanding of various beliefs and institutions in other cultures); g) cultural behavior-general (the degree of awareness and understanding of patterns of behavior observed in man); and, h) interpersonal sensitivity (the degree of awareness and understanding of verbal and nonverbal human behavior).

Subscales are reasonably independent and may be considered separately. Scale intercorrelations range from .01-.41; 21 of 28 are below .25. Test-retest reliability has been found to range from .57 to .86. The instrument consists of eighty statements to which respondents agree or disagree. Each subscale score ranged from 0-10 and could be categorized as follows: very low, low, medium, high, and very high. Categories were

based upon responses of a norm group composed of 648 Anglo American college graduates of programs that had been identified as 'helping professions' and who expected to work outside their own culture. No norms for counselors alone have been established. Administration time is 10-20 minutes.

Results

Table I reports the students' levels of cultural awareness in each of the eight scales. Lowest levels of awareness were indicated on the following subscales: cognitive flex, culture knowledge-specific and interpersonal sensitivity.

(Table 1)

These findings indicate that the areas that would be most troublesome to these students when in interaction with culturally different individuals would be in: 1) remaining open to and accepting of new ideas, beliefs, and perspectives and accepting them as valid (low mean score on the subscale cognitive flex); being able to identify ways specific cultural behaviors and beliefs uniquely differ from that of predominant USA (low mean score on the subscale cultural knowledge--specific); and, 3) effectively maintaining interaction with individuals whose interpersonal styles differ from their own (low mean score on the subscale interpersonal sensitivity).

The highest levels of awareness were indicated on the following subscales: cultural behavior-general and cultural knowledge-general. These results indicate that students overall recognize the study of cultural differences as necessary in attaining a better understanding of the behavioral and cognitive

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differences that do occur. All other subscales scores were found to fall within the medium range indicating no more ethnocentrism, cross-cultural experience or behavioral flex than most others intending to work with the culturally different.

No significant differences were found between subscale scores of doctoral and masters level participants as well as no significant gender differences.

Discussion and Recommendations

Teaching a cross-cultural course can be very challenging given all the information that must and should be disseminated during the 16 week semester or 8 week quarter. These findings indicate that graduate students entering cross-cultural courses have more knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity in some areas of multicultural experience than others. However, this study suggests an unique difficulty that instructors must overcome if they are to be effective. Seemingly students in this study typically arrived in class with very little knowledge of cultures that differed from that of predominant society in the USA (i.e. low mean score on the cultural knowledge-specific subscale). Most students reported that they actually were enrolled to learn about 'minority people' and how to 'treat' them in counseling. Textbooks and journal articles addressing the topic typically present information in such a way to satisfy this need for information by addressing several cultural norms related to race and ethnicity (i.e. **Understanding and counseling ethnic minorities** edited by George Henderson; **Toward Ethnic and Cultural Relevance in Human Encounters** edited by John Dillard; **Counseling the Culturally Different: Theory and Practice** edited by Derald

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Sue; **Counseling American Minorities** edited by Donald Atkinson, George Morten and Derald Sue; **Counseling and Development in a Multicultural Society** edited by John Axelson, **Clinical Guidelines in Cross-Cultural Mental Health** edited by Lillian Comas-Diaz and Ezra Griffith, etc.).

However, instructors' most challenging and time consuming task would seemingly be to challenge students' biases and prejudices when those students have difficulty accepting perspectives that differ from their own (low cognitive flex subscale scores) and are unable to effectively maintain interactions with those they perceive as 'different' and/or 'difficult' (low interpersonal sensitivity subscale scores). The instructor has the dilemma of attempting to increase the personal awareness of individuals who are not 'ready' cognitively to assimilate information that often conflicts with their racial, socioeconomic, educational, and cultural heritage in this country. Didactically addressing a specific topic in addition to facilitating structured exercises that increase the awareness of students who do not wish to become aware of their personal biases and prejudices or have them challenged are activities that most academicians never have to face in the classroom. The cross-cultural instructor is charged to do both, in addition to training future counselors to effectively and sensitively intervene with a culturally different individual who is in pain. "Can all of these be accomplished in one academic period?" remains the critical question.

Given the difficult task of incorporating all of the previously mentioned recommendations for effective multicultural

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counseling training into a one academic period, this author suggests that instructors emphasize the areas where students are found least competent and carefully limit time addressing other areas. Results support earlier literature which has indicated the necessity of emphasizing the following in cross-cultural coursework: a) readings addressing the history of several racial/ethnic groups in this country, detailed cultural specific information for each, as well as, the possible conflicts with the clearly identified values of middle-class Anglo culture; b) experiences that will assist students in increasing awareness of their personal biases and prejudices and how these influence their perceptions and treatment of those who are different; and c) supervised experiences actually counseling those who are culturally different, receiving feedback from clients, and having the opportunity to refine skills based upon this feedback and knowledge acquired during the course. However, the author believes that (b) and (c) alone could easily fill the entire semester, and suggests that (a) occur in the form of an independent study which would serve as a prerequisite for the actual course which would address (b) and (c) exclusively. Students might be given the option to identify two or three culturally different groups to examine in the literature and to become more familiar with interpersonally. Two of these groups could be racially/ethnically different from predominant America, while the third could be a special population unrelated to race and ethnicity. This strategy would allow students to complete training with specialty areas in a few populations, in contrast to only being exposed to the

limited literature about several groups addressed in one text.

Subscales with scores indicating higher knowledge base or sensitivity would be addressed minimally, if at all. For instance, given the higher cultural knowledge-general and cultural behavior-general scores found in this study, little, if any time would be spent in convincing students of the legitimacy of the course. Such scores indicate that most students arrive aware of the importance of such coursework.

Narrowing the focus of the course would allow instructors much more time to execute and process classroom experiences which increase students openness to new perspectives as well as teach students how to effectively apply multicultural counseling knowledge (i.e. with prompted culturally different individuals). These findings suggest that it is in these areas that students need the most assistance.

Although the author believes that these findings are very important and worthy of attention, readers must note the limitations in this descriptive study. First, student responses are compared to a norm based upon the responses of a general population of individuals in 'helping professions' who expected to work in some capacity in a culture different than that of mainstream White America. No norm for mental health professionals has been established. This could mean that the established norm for the CSI might be the same, significantly higher, or significantly lower than that necessary for a counselor to be perceived as culturally sensitive. This is particularly true given that the researcher was unable to differentiate between those who were enrolled only because it was a required

course from those who intended to actually work in an environment that would be perceived as culturally different. Even though this is unknown at the present time, this author believes that the variance among the subscale scores continues to be a critical issue in developing future coursework.

Second, the sample only included Anglo American students and therefore the generalizability of the results is limited. For example, findings cannot be applied to multicultural counselor education at a traditionally African American university with an all-Black class. Nor can findings be generalized to multicultural counselor education of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in a traditionally Anglo American university.

Third, the sample size is small and was limited regionally and to only one course on one university campus. Although graduate students' geographical origins are typically quite diverse, such could limit the generalizability of these results to other graduate student populations. Other populations could have strengths and weaknesses that differ from this sample. Replication on a larger scale is certainly warranted if future counselors are to be adequately trained to address the increasing diversity and the changing cultural norms in the USA today.

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Table 1

Culture Shock Inventory Subscale Score

Means, Standard Deviations (SD), and Categories

Subscale	Mean	SD	Category
A. Lack of Western Ethnocentrism	6.87	2.3	Medium
B. Culture Experience	4.25	2.5	Medium
C. Cognitive Flex	5.44	1.8	Low
D. Behavioral Flex	6.48	1.9	Medium
E. Cultural Knowledge-Specific	5.40	2.1	Low
F. Cultural Knowledge-General	7.79	1.5	High
G. Cultural Behavior-General	9.39	2.0	Very High
H. Interpersonal Sensitivity	7.53	1.8	Low